

You Can Help Cut Acrylamide in Your Diet

If you're trying to lose weight, you may already be telling your waiter to hold the fries. Now there's another health benefit you can reap: Cutting down on certain fried foods can also help you cut down on the amount of acrylamide you eat.

That's a good thing because high levels of acrylamide have been found to cause cancer in animals, and on that basis scientists believe it is likely to cause cancer in humans as well.

FDA chemist Lauren Robin explains that acrylamide is a chemical that can form in some foods—mainly plant-based foods—during high-temperature cooking processes like frying and baking. These include potatoes, cereals, coffee, crackers or breads, dried fruits and many other foods. According to the Grocery Manufacturers Association, acrylamide is found in 40 percent of the calories consumed in the average American diet.

While acrylamide has probably been around as long as people have been baking, roasting, toasting or frying foods, it was only in 2002 that



FDA also recommends that you adopt a healthy eating plan, consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, available at:

www.cnpp.usda.gov/dgas2010-policydocument.htm

scientists first discovered the chemical in food. Since then, the FDA has been actively investigating the effects of acrylamide as well as potential measures to reduce it. Today, the FDA posts a draft document with practical strategies to help growers, manufacturers and food service operators lower the amount of acrylamide in foods associated with higher levels of the chemical.

In addition, there are a number of steps you and your family can take to cut down on the amount of acrylamide in the foods you eat.

Acrylamide forms from sugars and an amino acid that are naturally present in food. It does not form, or forms at lower levels, in dairy, meat and fish products. The formation occurs when foods are cooked at home and in restaurants as well as when they are made commercially.

"Generally speaking, acrylamide is more likely to accumulate when cooking is done for longer periods or at higher temperatures," Robin says. Boiling and steaming foods do not typically form acrylamide.

Tips for Cutting Down on Acrylamide

Given the widespread presence of acrylamide in foods, it isn't feasible


to completely eliminate acrylamide from one's diet, Robin says. Nor is it necessary. Removing any one or two foods from your diet would not have a significant effect on overall exposure to acrylamide.

However, here are some steps you can take to help decrease the amount of acrylamide that you and your family consume:


- Frying causes acrylamide formation. If frying frozen fries, follow manufacturers' recommendations on time and temperature and avoid overcooking, heavy crisping or burning.
- Toast bread to a light brown color rather than a dark brown color. Avoid very brown areas.
- Cook cut potato products such as frozen french fries to a golden yellow color rather than a brown color. Brown areas tend to contain more acrylamide.
- Do not store potatoes in the refrigerator, which can increase acrylamide during cooking. Keep potatoes outside the refrigerator in a dark, cool place, such as a closet or a pantry.

FDA also recommends that you

adopt a healthy eating plan, consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, including:

- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk products.
- Include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts.
- Choose foods low in saturated fats, trans fat (which both raises your bad LDL cholesterol and lowers your good HDL cholesterol and is linked to heart attacks), cholesterol, salt and added sugars. 

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